

Psychiatrist's Defector Report Defended by Government Consultant

By Eye Edstrom
Staff Reporter

Dr. John R. Cavanagh, Washington psychiatrist and consultant to Government agencies, has defended the position taken by the psychiatrist who revealed information obtained from defector Bernon F. Mitchell.

Dr. Cavanagh's views on the matter will be published next week as an editorial in the Bulletin of the Guild of Catholic Psychiatrists of which he is editor.

In the editorial Dr. Cavanagh cites the "case of the

psychiatrist who testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee" which inquired into the defection of Mitchell, former Government code clerk, to Moscow.

That psychiatrist was Dr. Clarence Schilt of 10620 Georgia ave., Silver Spring, who disclosed problems of family, religion and sex which Mitchell had discussed with him during three one-hour psychiatric consultation sessions.

Although Dr. Cavanagh does not mention Dr. Schilt by name, he notes the psychiatrist who testified has been

criticized by some psychiatrists for breaching professional confidence.

But Dr. Cavanagh, like Dr. Schilt, holds there was no such breach in the Mitchell case because "the common good is more important than that of the individual."

Dr. Cavanagh states that "under rare circumstances," a psychiatrist should reveal to responsible Government officials information which indicates a threat to the security of the United States.

The psychiatrist, he continues, is a loyal citizen who

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recognizes his citizenship as his primary concern and would know that his loyal patients would want him to speak out against traitorous and disloyal behavior."

Dr. Cavanagh omitted specific reference to the Mitchell case, but quoted liberally from his editorial when he spoke yesterday to Government personnel and administrative officials who attended a seminar on the early recognition of emotional problems. The seminar was under the sponsorship of the Civil Service Commission.

Dr. Cavanagh observed that generally the information given by a patient to his psychiatrist is an "entrusted secret," which is the "most inviolable" secret short of the "seal of the confessional."

But, he emphasized, there is "no such thing as unqualified confidentiality," that confidential material may be revealed if it is necessary to avert great harm to the state, a third or innocent party or the client.

He also added that privilege is waived if a psychiatrist examines a patient as part of a

pre-employment check. Should the prospective employee desire that some information be withheld, Dr. Cavanagh said the psychiatrist should refuse to examine him.

On other matters, Dr. Cavanagh declared homosexuality "is not necessarily a disqualifying condition" to employment. He said sexual disturbance per se does not "make an individual disloyal or more likely to be disloyal, especially if his condition is known and recorded in his personnel file," because he then "is not subject to blackmail or coercion."